# Living Together in Harmony

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Sister Annabel's summary of Thay's translation for the children:

Two young people, one representing America, one representing Europe, were talking about the happiness in their daily lives, the difficulties they meet every day, and the things they want to have happen. The girl who represents North America said that when she hears the birds sing in the morning, it brings her happiness. When she meets her friends, her dear ones, she feels happy. When she's in touch with what is wonderful in the present moment, she is happy. Her difficulty is that she is pulled back into the past. The suffering she has had in the past seems to imprison her, and stop her going deeply into the happiness of the present moment. Another difficulty she has is that everything is impermanent, but she wants nothing to change, from her body to her soul, her mind, the things around her, she wants them to stay exactly as they are, but the truth is that everything is impermanent and changing.

The girl who represents Europe said that when she came here she had a lot of happiness, but that she had one very big difficulty: that her father and mother were always fighting. And every time that would happen she suffered a great deal. She really wants to tell her father and mother that she loves them very much, and say to them: "Don't make me suffer anymore." That is her deepest desire. The girl from the United States also said that one of her deep desires is to be able to tell her father that she loves him.

The girl from Europe said that when she came here she wanted to be able to practice so as to be strong enough to tell her parents that they shouldn't fight anymore. It seems so easy.

If we come here and we practice we will be able to do that—we will be able to tell our parents what we need to tell them. So, please smile and breathe, listening to the bell: "Breathing in. I know I am at Plum Village with all my friends; breathing out, I smile to Plum Village and all my friends."

(Three bells)

Dear Sangha, today is the nineteenth of July, 1998. We are in the Lower Hamlet, and the Dharma talk will be in Vietnamese. Somebody asked, "Can you tell me what is an ideal father?" Somebody else replied, "An ideal father is someone who knows how to love Mother and how to make Mother happy." It seems to be a very simple answer, but it's also very deep. What does a child need most of all? Does he need money to buy presents;

does she need money to buy toys? What does a child need most of all? What a child needs most of all is the love of the father.

There are many children who have so many toys and so much pocket money, but they're not happy because their father is always making their mother suffer, and often the children are very sad. They want to run away, because the atmosphere in the family is so heavy, like the atmosphere before a heavy storm. The atmosphere is a suffering atmosphere, in the house and in the family, and Father brings about this atmosphere when he makes Mother suffer. So the child wants to run away, but where can he or she run? In former times we may have had a house and a nice garden, with a little pond, with plenty of room, and the child could run out into the garden and sit by the pond, or run to a neighbor, meet an aunt or an uncle in the village…but now, we may be living in a high apartment block, and the child in this environment has no where to run to--there's only one place, and that is the toilet or bathroom, to close the door and run away there. This suffocating, heavy atmosphere destroys and withers the child, so the child wants to run away, and the child doesn't know where to go, so she goes into the toilet and cries on her own. But even in the toilet she doesn't feel safe, because she can still hear the voices of Mother crying or Father talking.

The children who live right in the middle of such an atmosphere cannot grow up in a fresh and beautiful way; it is just like the tree in the garden when there is no sunshine or no rain or no gardener to look after it. When such a tree grows up, it also has to have a family: it has to have a wife, a husband and children. But it doesn't know how to make the family happy, because the child has not learned that from Father. The child doesn't know how to love Mother, how to look after Mother. The father did not know how to look after Mother, and because the child has never seen Father look after Mother, he hasn't been able to learn how to love. When that child marries he or she repeats the mistakes of Father or Mother, and these mistakes bring about suffering again for the dear ones. This is what we call S*amsara;* it means the cycle of rebirth, which never comes to an end, and from one generation to the next, this suffering continues to be handed down. Only when we are able to be in touch with the real teachings and learn ways of practice are we able to break into this cycle of suffering called Samsara.

When children come to Plum Village, they can learn ways to break this cycle, so that they can open up a new area in which the father will have the capacity, the art of bringing happiness, care and love to his wife. Many young people say that the most precious gift, which parents can give to their children, is the happiness of the parents. The children don't need a lot: all they need is for their parents to be happy together, and that is enough for the children to be happy. So if we are a mother or a father, we must know that the thing our child needs most is our happiness, and our happiness with our spouse. That is the greatest gift we can give our children. And if our parents want to make each other happy, they should know how to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training, at the very least. The Fourth Mindfulness Training is the capacity to listen deeply, and to speak gently and lovingly. Deep listening, loving speech, this is all parents need to learn, and they will be able to establish communication, and not make each other suffer. Then they will offer to their children a great deal of happiness.

Listening deeply is something we have to learn to do—we can't do it just like that. When the other person is talking he or she is trying to express his or her difficulties and

sufferings, and needs us to listen to that. But if we are not capable of listening, then the person who is speaking will not feel any relief in his or her suffering, and will finally give up talking. So when we love someone, our wife, our husband, our children, our father, we need to practice listening deeply to that person. Maybe our father does not know how to listen to our mother, or our mother does not know how to listen deeply to our father, but what of us? Do we know how to listen deeply to our mother and father? Sometimes we say, "My mother doesn't listen to my father, my father doesn't listen to my mother." But we ourselves do not listen deeply to our mother or father either. Therefore, mother, father and child, when they go to the temple, when they go to the meditation center, must practice listening deeply, because listening deeply is the practice of Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*. This morning the monks and nuns have sung the praises of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who has a very skilful way of listening deeply. That is why she is called *Quan The Am:* it means, "observing the sounds that come from the world."

People who have suffering, who have feelings hidden deep in their hearts, which they have not been able to express, they need an opportunity to express this suffering, and if no one sits to listen to them, how can they have that opportunity to express these hidden feelings of suffering? Therefore we need to practice looking deeply into that person, and that is the way to show that we love them. If we are a father and we want to listen to our children, we can sit alongside our child in silence, and then we say: "My dear child, please tell me, do you have any difficulties? Do you have any suffering? Please tell me. I want to listen so I can see if I can help you at all." So the father says this with his heart. And if we are a wife, and we know our husband has sufferings and difficulties which he has not been able to talk about, we go to our husband, and sit silently, very freshly, alongside him, and then we say: "My dear husband, do you have any suffering? Do you have any difficulties hidden in your heart? Please let me know about them." The wife must say that.

If we are a husband or a father and we have suffering—and we all have suffering; some of us have a great deal, some of us have a little—when the other person says that to us, we see we have an opportunity to say what we want to. At first it's difficult for us to say it. No one has tried to listen to us before, and now when somebody invites us to speak like that, we're not sure if we really believe it. But the wife, or whoever asks the question, should be patient and say, "Please, please tell me. It may be because of my unskillfulness, my foolishness, that you suffer, and I want to hear this. Please tell me if I do anything foolish or clumsy which makes you suffer. I promise that I will sit by you very calmly and silently and listen, because I am practicing as a student of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will not judge, I will not react, I will not be angry. My teacher and my Sangha have told me how to practice being peaceful and calm, how to eat peacefully, how to walk peacefully, how to sit peacefully, and now I am able to sit and listen. I'm not like I used to be." We can try to persuade our husbands like that, so he can say his difficulties for us to hear.

If we are children, we shouldn't think that only we suffer, as children. Father suffers Father has difficulties. Therefore we can practice, and we can say, "Daddy, I know you are my father, but I know you have difficulties. Sometimes you are angry with me, sometimes you are upset with me, sometimes I don't do what you like, but that is because I don't know your heart, I don't know your difficulties. And now I want to hear you; I want to her the things that you don't like about me, that you think I can improve. And I

will listen to you, I will listen with the heart of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, because I have been to the meditation center, I have met the monks and nuns, I have met the Sangha and I have learned how to sit and listen deeply. So please, Father, tell me, and I will be like Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will sit and listen very attentively. I will listen with all my ears, not half my ears, and I will listen with my heart, because Avalokiteshvara is one who can listen with both the ears and with the heart, and can listen for an hour like that." When the child listens to the father for an hour like that, the father will feel much better.

We all have to practice in the family: mother, father, and child. We can't just listen deeply because we want to do it, we have to practice first, because if we stop listening halfway through, the other person will feel: "What a waste of time!" If we are listening and people say things that are completely wrong—they have misunderstood us completely—when they describe these things, we feel their lack of loyalty towards us, we feel their misunderstanding, we hear them condemning and criticizing us, and as we listen to them, it may water all the seeds of our suffering. We can shout back at them or we can run out, but if we do either, we have not succeeded in our practice of listening deeply.

Have Father and Mother been successful yet in practicing listening deeply? If Mother and Father have not yet been successful, we as children have to help them. We have to listen to Father and Mother. We have to prove that we as children are able to listen deeply. We are able to understand our father, we are able to listen to our mother and understand our mother. And we can go to our mother and say, "Mother, you know I went to Father, I listened deeply, and now I understand Father, and I see Father suffers much less. Please, Mother, do the same thing. I'm going to help you to be able to sit and listen deeply to Father."

If you are only a child, you may only be small, you may not have great wisdom, but you have been in touch with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with the monks and the nuns, and you can also help your father. "Father, have you practiced listening to Mother yet? My mother has so many difficulties and sadness in her heart, many things you don't know about. So please, father, listen to mother deeply. I've practiced listening to mother deeply, and I know you can do it. I will support you. Father, please listen to mother deeply, please do so in silence, and when mother says something that's not true, don't get angry; just breathe and listen deeply so she suffers less. Don't listen deeply in order to blame, in order to criticize. And if you can't do it yet, Father, please go to the meditation center and learn walking meditation, learn sitting meditation, learn how to walk in mindfulness and to eat in mindfulness, and then after a matter of days you will be able to practice listening deeply."

Listening deeply is the most wonderful practice of Buddha and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and when we say the name of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, it means that we accept Avalokiteshvara as our teacher. Avalokiteshvara has the capacity to listen deeply. Therefore, if we are a student of Avalokiteshvara, we have to practice listening deeply too. Today, you very little children have heard this; remember the words I have just taught you. When Father and Mother are not happy together, you have to join your palms and say to them, "Mother, Father, where is my present? My present is your happiness. If you don't give me that present I'm going to suffer a lot." That is a bell of

mindfulness to wake up Mother and Father, and then Mother and Father will try to practice.

When you little children hear the sound of the bell, please stand up, and bow, and you can go out. But the older children please stay behind—only the very tiny ones go out now.

(Bell)

Today, what I've tried to tell you children is that you learn to say to your parents, "Dear Mommy and Daddy, the greatest gift you can give me is your happiness. Please give me that present."

(Bell)

Today, we have begun to learn about a method of deep listening. As we already know, we have to practice before we can listen deeply. Sometimes we can also translate "deep listening" as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don't listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to. We have to sit still, we have to sit with inner freedom, and we have to be one hundred percent present, body and mind, listening so the other can relieve his or her suffering. If the other person says things which are not right, which are wrong perceptions, we may have a wish to respond, to say, "That's wrong!" and to argue with them. But we mustn't do that—we have to sit and listen. If we can sit for an hour, that is a golden hour. That hour is an hour, which can heal and transform.

We can do much better than psychotherapists, because there are psychotherapists who haven't learned how to listen deeply, who haven't learned how to listen compassionately. Psychotherapists have their own suffering, maybe a great deal of suffering, so that their capacity to listen deeply may not be very great. We don't know much about the theories of psychotherapy, but we have practiced stopping and looking deeply, we have already practiced listening deeply, and therefore we can do better than psychotherapists. We use the method of listening deeply, first of all for our loved ones and our family, and once we are successful with our family we can help our friends. We can listen deeply so that the world suffers less; that is our practice. Of course, psychotherapists have to learn how to listen deeply according to the practice in order to be really good psychotherapists.

When we can listen deeply, when we know how to do it, when we know how to speak lovingly as well, that has the function of reviving the communication between two people. Actually, when we know how to listen deeply, we will already speak lovingly. (Next time I talk, we will learn about using loving speech, and that belongs to the Fourth Mindfulness Training. We will learn more about these things in our Dharma discussions.) In our own time, the technology of communication is very great. We have all kinds of communication, like e-mail, fax and telephone, and therefore we can be in touch with each other very quickly, and in a couple hours the news can be taken from one end of the world to the other. But, there is obstruction in the communication between people in the family, between father and son, between wife and husband. Therefore, it is very important for us to learn how to listen deeply.

The children have spoken the truth: the reason that father and mother make each other suffer is that they don't understand each other, they don't know how to listen to each other deeply. They don't have the capacity to use loving speech. Father and mother do not know that while they are making each other suffer, they are also making their children suffer. And who are their children? Their children are their continuation. To say it in another way, our children are ourselves. And when we make ourselves suffer, when we make our husband or wife suffer, we are also making our children suffer. Our children will also make our grandchildren suffer, because we don't have the capacity to show to our children the art of making happiness, or the art of making our spouses happy. And how can our children learn that, if they can't learn it from us? If they don't learn it, they will grow up and make the same mistakes we have made, and this cycle of Samsara will carry on in our children; and our suffering will be handed on to our children, and our children's suffering will be handed on to our grandchildren, and this cycle of Samsara will never come to an end. We have to put an end to this cycle by the method of listening deeply and using loving speech. Using loving speech and listening deeply will establish communication, and when there is communication and understanding between us, then happiness will be there.

Maybe in former times Mother and Father could smile to each other: in that moment when they first knew each other, when they first fell in love, and they did not know that this person was going to live with them for the rest of their lives. So when a couple makes a decision, in a superficial way, to live together for their whole lives, and these two bodies have come to live together, but their souls are not in harmony, there is not communication, there is not understanding, there is not sharing of the deep things of their souls, then there is no communication. If we are young, we know that in former times our father was a young person, our mother was young too, and in those moments when they first came together and when they had not yet shared the deepest things of their hearts, then they made a mistake. That started their suffering for the rest of their lives. And we see that as children we are continuing with that suffering, and if we are not skilful, if we are not clever, we will repeat the mistakes our mothers and fathers made, especially when we are attached, and we fall in love, and we make a commitment to stay with the other person. We don't want to do as our mother and father have done, but in the end we will do as our mother and father did, and we will make our partner suffer, and we will give birth to children who will suffer too, and that is called Samsara.

A person is made out of body and mind. If there is only communication between the bodies but not between the souls, that is something very dangerous. When we love each other, we want to be close to each other, but is this closeness a closeness of souls, where there is communication, where there is understanding, where we can share spiritual values together? Then the coming together of the two bodies will have meaning and will bring happiness. But if two bodies come together without a coming together of the souls, then there will be suffering, and we will not be able to tell our children what real love is. Then we can call the coming together of the two bodies "empty sex."

When children of twelve or thirteen years old, or thirteen or fourteen years old, come together, and sleep together, what will happen? There is the coming together of the two bodies, pushed along by sexual desire, and then the two children don't understand each other, don't know anything about each other, they don't know what love is. That is the

thing that we call empty sex, and it is very dangerous, because then those two young people will go deep into the path of sexual desire, where there's nothing else but sex, no understanding. This is taught very clearly in the Asian tradition, and I think this existed in former times in the Western tradition as well.

In the Asian tradition, our bodies are also sacred, like our souls, and we cannot share our bodies with just anybody. In our bodies there are areas, which are very sacred, like the top of our head, for example. Usually a father and mother in Vietnam, when their child is standing in front of them at the age of three or four years old, will ask their child: "My child, do you love your parents?" and the child says, "I love Mommy, I love Daddy." And the parents ask, "Where do you put your love for your parents?" and the child says "I put my love for my parents on my head." The top of the head, as far as the Asian person is concerned, especially a Vietnamese person, is the altar; and on that altar we put the most sacred thing. For example, if we go into a house in Vietnam, we may see that that house is very poor, but there is always an ancestral altar. That ancestral altar is very sacred. We put maybe just one plate of fruit or a vase of flowers, or some incense on that table. We don't go to the market and then put down the shopping bag on the ancestral altar when we come home. That is a great irreverence, and nobody would ever do that.

As far as our body is concerned, the altar of our body is the top of our head, and we worship the Buddha, we worship the ancestors on the top of our head. And as far as a Vietnamese person is concerned, if somebody else puts his or her hand on our head, that is very irreverent. There are Westerners who don't understand that and they may put their hand on our head, but we feel like saying to them, "Please, put your hand on my shoulder, but not on my head. Otherwise I will feel very offended, I feel that's very offensive."

If the monks and nuns in Plum Village are holding something precious, related the Dharma, such as their Sutra or their Sanghati robe, and somebody comes to say hello to them or to give them a letter, they have to put their Sanghati robe on their head, on the altar of their body. That is the worthiest place to put their robe. They could not put it on the earth. You cannot put the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, or the *Amitabha Sutra* on the earth. We feel respect for the Sutra, the Sutra is a Dharma jewel, and we have to put it in a very clean place. It is the same with our Sanghati robe; our Sanghati robe was given to us by the Buddha, by our teacher, so we can make ceremonies. We cannot put it on the earth. If there's no table nearby, we have to put it on top of our heads, and when we receive the letter we put it in our pocket, and then we take the robe off our head and hold it in our hands.

Apart from the top of our heads, there are other sacred parts of our body. There are other parts of our body that we don't want anyone to see, that we don't want anyone to touch. This is true of a girl, and it is true of a boy. Our body is sacred, like our soul. In our soul, there are sacred areas we don't want anyone to see or to touch. There are experiences; there are images, which we want to keep hidden just for ourselves. We don't want to share them with anybody--only when that person is someone in whom we have the most confidence in the world, whom we love most in the world, then we will take those things from the depths of our hearts and we will show them to them. But the number of people in this world with whom we can share these things are very few, probably only one. There are areas in our soul that are forbidden areas, like in the imperial city, where there are the forbidden places you can't enter. If you go in you will be arrested, and you will

have your head cut off. Our soul is the same, and our body is the same. There are secret areas that are very sacred, and we can't allow just anyone to come in. We can hold someone's hand, we can put our hand on somebody's shoulder, but if we touch these sacred areas, these secret areas of our bodies, that is something we should not do, and that includes the top of our heads.

Only when we have a friend who really understands us, who really loves us, who will die with us, can we share those deeply hidden areas of our bodies and our souls. And then the coming together of two bodies is like a very sacred ceremony. This coming together of the two bodies is at the same time the coming together of two souls, and it will bring about happiness. In former times this was very clear as far as Eastern people were concerned, and I am confident that in the Western tradition that exists also, but it has been lost for many of us; we look down on our bodies, we look down on our souls, and we do not see their sacredness. And we do not look after our bodies and souls at the time of coming together with another body. When these children of thirteen and fourteen have sex together, it is something very dangerous. They do not know what love is, they do not know what the body is, they do not know what the soul is. And if they do that, in the future they won't have the opportunity to know what real love is, what real communication is. This is a fruit that is not yet ripe; this is a flower, which has not yet opened. Therefore, we have to protect our young people.

If we are young people, we have to protect our own bodies, and we have to know the Third Mindfulness Training, on knowing how to practice chastity. If we have sex without protecting the integrity of our body and our mind, or of the body and mind of the person we love, we are offending against the Third Mindfulness Training. And if two bodies have sex when there is not yet the meeting of the two souls, when there is not yet understanding, it is very dangerous. We have to avoid it, we have to stop it, we shouldn't allow it to happen. Otherwise we are going against the teachings of the Third Mindfulness Training.

In the 1930's and 1940's there was a young poet who wrote just about love poetry, and one day he wrote a poem that said:

You're Still Very Far Away

One day you were sitting far from me.
I asked you to come and sit near to me.
You came a little nearer, and I was upset.
You came a little nearer all the time.
I was about to get angry.
You quickly stood up
And came and sat near me.
There you were. I was happy.
But soon I became sad again,
Because I saw that we were still very far from each other:
Sitting very near, still very far.
Why far? We were sitting next to each other,
Our bodies were right next to each other.
Why were we far?

Because there was still not communication between our souls.
The two universes were still far apart.

These two young people, though they sleep together, are still far apart. They cannot take away the wall, which is dividing them. When we sleep with a person, we may feel that because we are near them, there is communication; but that is an illusion. The coming together of two bodies can bring about greater separation than there was before. Many people have witnessed that if there is not understanding, communication, real love, deep sharing in our ideals and our life, and we put our two bodies together and have sex together, then not only will there be no communication at that time, but a huge rift can be dug between us, and that is very dangerous.

When the poet wrote this poem he did not want to say what I have said here, but he said it in poetry: "I was angry because you were not near enough to me, but when you came and sat very near to me, I thought I was satisfied. But that satisfaction existed only for a few moments, and then I was sad because I saw that we were not close at all. But there's no way for us to get closer. The only way we could have gotten closer was by deep understanding, by being able to share with each other our suffering, our ideals, our difficulties." Therefore, to practice communication by listening deeply, and by speaking lovingly is so important.

(Bell)

In Buddhism there is an expression, a very sweet expression: *kalyanamitra*, which means a friend in the practice, a spiritual friend. This is a friend who helps us to go forward on our spiritual path. We are happy when we have a friend who can support us, who can protect us, who can help us to go forward on the path of understanding and love, the path of making others happy. If we have a spiritual friend like that, we have to do all we can to keep that friend, because if we lose that friend, we can lose everything. This is the most necessary companion in life. He has stopped us going through the paths of darkness; he has held us so we can go on the path of our ideal. That is the spiritual friend, the kalyanamitra. *Mitra* means friend. *Kalyana* means good. If the person we love is a kalyanamitra, then we are fortunate, because in that person there is the essence called inner freedom, or happiness. If we can go on our spiritual path, our life's path, with such a person, then we are someone with happiness. Maybe we have a spiritual friend like that, but maybe we have not been able to recognize that we have a spiritual friend. We could lose that person easily if we don't recognize that they are a spiritual friend. Maybe near us there is someone like that, ready to be our friend on the path, ready to support us, to protect us, to help us; but because we do not dwell in the present moment, we do not have clear vision, we cannot see that that person is present. And if we return to the present moment and look around, we may discover, "I have a kalyanamitra, a precious spiritual friend." When we have been able to recognize our kalyanamitra, we will have a great deal of happiness, and we will make a deep vow that we will never say or do anything to lose this person from our life.

When I was young, when I was a novice, I read that our father and mother gave us physical birth, but the person who helps us to realize our ideal is our spiritual friend. Although our parents gave us birth, they may not be able to help us realize our spiritual

ideal. But our friend, our kalyanamitra, is the person who will help us to realize our path. And this is also true of teacher and disciple. Our teacher has given birth to our spiritual life, but maybe our teacher can't help us to grow up on the spiritual path, maybe we have to have spiritual friends, and only then can we grow up on the spiritual path. When I was sixteen years old I really learned these words; "Mother and Father give us physical life, and our spiritual friend is the one who helps us realize the path." I have never forgotten these words, and I realize that if I were to lose my spiritual friend, I could lose my spiritual life. Therefore we have to be so careful.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* it says that the kalyanamitra is the person who is able to help us to keep our *bodhicitta*, that is our mind of awakening, our mind of love. Our bodhicitta is a very great energy in our life of practice, and our following the path of practice. The bodhicitta, the mind of love, is the energy, which wants us to go towards transformation of suffering, not only in ourselves, but in all those around us. And when we have this mind of love, we are strong, and when our bodhicitta is solid and firm, then our path ahead is very straight. We have energy and we have solidity. But if this bodhicitta is weakened or fades, then our happiness will fade also, and we will not be able to offer happiness to those around us, to those we love, and others too. Therefore, keeping the bodhicitta, in order to be able to continue on the path of our deepest ideal, is something very important, and the person who can help us to keep this bodhicitta solidly is our kalyanamitra. Therefore our spiritual friend is the one who is able to help us to dwell with and in our bodhicitta, so that our bodhicitta, our mind of life, never falls from our heart.

In our life we need to find a spiritual friend. If we do not yet have that person, we should look for them. We may have a teacher, but a teacher is not enough. We need a friend, and that friend, that kalyanamitra, is our place of refuge. We may find that friend in a Sangha: someone we trust, someone whom, when we sit next to them we feel solid, we feel free, we feel solid in our path of practice. We must call this person our kalyanamitra. Thank you, my spiritual friend, for being present in my life. A kalyanamitra, according to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, is someone who helps us grow up in our capacity to practice solidly, to practice diligently. This person induces us to develop our wholesome roots, because we all have wholesome roots, we all have the seeds of love, of forgiveness, of joy, of wisdom and of happiness. These seeds are present in the souls of all of us, but our kalyanamitra is the person who has the capacity every day to water those seeds, to help those seeds grow up. If we do not have a kalyanamitra, the good seeds in our soul, in our hearts, will not continue to develop. Therefore I need my kalyanamitra just as a tree needs the light of the sun everyday.

If we are still young, we should know that we need a spiritual friend. Many friends will draw us into dark parts, which will destroy our body and our mind, and we will not have the energy and the joy of life. We should recognize that these friends are not people that we should be close to; people like this we cannot call kalyanamitra. Instead of spiritual friends, we have to call them "evil friends." We need to stay away from anyone we recognize as evil friend, an unwholesome friend, somebody who draws us into wine bars, into places where drugs are used, where there are addicts, people who speak roughly, people who don't know how to listen deeply, people whose words are as violent as their actions. If we live with them, if we keep going back to them, our bodies and our minds will be destroyed by them, we will make ourselves suffer, and we will make our parents suffer. So we have to recognize who are the unwholesome friends, who are the good

spiritual friends, and when we have found the good spiritual friends, we have to be determined not lose them. Father and Mother gave us our physical birth, but those who help us grow upon the path of practice are our spiritual friends.

Our spiritual friend is someone who knows how to live in mindfulness, who knows how to live according to the principles of the five mindfulness Trainings. Living according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings is living under the protection of the Three Energies. These Three Energies protect us and direct us, look after us, and these Three Energies are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These three energies are not ideas, or something outside of us. These three energies are things we can be in touch with when we are mindful.

What is Buddha? Buddha is awakening, Buddha is the energy of awakening, Buddha is mindfulness. Whenever we return and dwell peacefully in the present moment, whenever our bodies and minds come back and are one, whenever we know how to breathe mindfully, walk mindfully, eat mindfully, recognize the presence of our loved ones, Buddha is present, and that energy is called the energy of awakening, of mindfulness. When we have that energy in us, we know we have Buddha in our hearts, and Buddha is protecting us. Buddha is not some symbol. Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not one person. In the past there have been many Buddhas, in the present there are many Buddhas, and in the future there will be many Buddhas. Buddha is anyone who has the energy of awakening, the energy of love, of understanding and mindfulness. That is what we call Buddha, and all of us have the seeds of mindfulness, of love, of understanding, of forgiveness in us, and when we return to ourselves and recognize those seeds in us and we help those seeds to grow, then we are in touch with Buddha in our own persons. There is no one who does not have the seeds of Buddha; there is no one who does not have the capacity to be in touch with Buddha in their own person. Therefore to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is a wonderful method, very concrete, for mindfulness always to be there in our daily lives. And mindfulness is Buddha. And this Buddha is not the past; Buddha is the present.

And what is Dharma? Dharma is the practice of mindfulness, all the different ways of practicing mindfulness. We could say that Dharma is the Dharma talk, Dharma is the Sutra, but a Dharma talk or a sutra is not the living Dharma. Living Dharma is when we know how to walk mindfully, when we know how to sit mindfully, when we know how to eat mindfully, we know how to breathe mindfully, we know how to recognize what is happening in the present moment. These practices are living Dharma. If we practice mindfulness in our daily life, then we are making Dharma shine all around us. When people look at us they will see us as the living Dharma. Living Dharma is not made by images and sounds it is made by life. Therefore, someone who knows how to practice mindfulness when walking, sitting, washing clothes, making tea, looking after and loving, that person is a manifestation of living Dharma. Though that person does not give Dharma talks, such a person is giving a Dharma talk with his body with her life… teaching by their lives, and not just by Dharma talk. When we live like that we are protected by the second energy, called the energy of the true teachings.

The third energy is Sangha. Sangha is the community. In the community you have teachers, monks, nuns, and lay people. It is called the four-fold Sangha, and they are there to look after a practice center, so that the people practicing there are solid, and it is the safest place for us to come to. We can be protected there, because everyone there is

practicing mindfulness, breathing mindfully, eating mindfully, working mindfully; therefore the energy of the Sangha will look after us and protect us.

And we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings: the First, the Second, the Third, the Fourth and the Fifth. We talked a little bit before of the Third Mindfulness Training, how to protect our bodies, our integrity and our chastity, and that of others as well. We also talked a little bit about the Fourth Mindfulness Training, how to listen deeply and practice loving speech. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are practicing very concretely the method of mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness is to have the protection of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings solidly, we will have a "precepts body, " called *silakaya*, and this precepts body will protect us in our daily lives. When this precepts body is whole, that is because of our practice of the Mindfulness Trainings and of the Mindful Manners in a very wholesome way--we are protected by the three energies of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we offend against the Mindfulness Trainings and we offend against the Mindful Manners, our precepts body is cracked, and then we are not protected anymore. We fall into situations of danger, misfortune, because our precepts body has been broken, it is no longer whole. Wherever we go, fear goes with us. If, for instance, we are dying, we have an accident, we are wounded, we will feel that there is nothing to protect us. When people have been through accidents and dangers, they need the protection of their precepts body. Without it, they will be very afraid, and that fear will take away all their peace; when fear is there, we cannot overcome the accident, the death, the sickness, and the loss of our lives. If we don't want this to happen, the best thing we can do is to protect ourselves with the energy of mindfulness, to keep our precepts body whole, unbroken.

(Bell)
If you want to succeed in your practice, if you want to arrive at transformation and healing, you should rely on the Mindfulness Trainings, and you should rely on your spiritual friend. Your spiritual friend is someone who keeps the Mindfulness Trainings. That person is solid, has inner freedom, and is fearless. If we are near to someone like that, we will enjoy the freedom, the fearlessness and the solidity of that person. If in our lives we have these two things, the Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend, then our lives will be successful. We should never allow these two things to fall from our hands—actually these two things are one. When we do not have a spiritual friend, we should look and find a spiritual friend. When we do not have Mindfulness Trainings, we should look and find Mindfulness Trainings.

In our relationships with our loved ones, our father, our mother, or our children, if there are difficulties, sufferings, we should rely on our Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend to re-establish the communication, so that we will easily use loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about happiness for our family, and to open a path to a wholesome future. When we learn how to listen deeply and use loving speech, we can begin to re-establish communication between ourselves and our mother or our father, or with our husband, or our wife. If we cannot yet speak directly to them, we can write a letter to them, because writing a letter is a way of communicating, and it can be a very deep art. We write down what we want to say in a letter…maybe we can't say these things to him, we feel unnatural saying them, but we sit in our room, we take a piece of paper and a pen, and we say, "Dear father, do you know I love you? I understand you are suffering, I understand your difficulties, and I want to tell you that I love you, I

understand you, and I want you to be happy." We can write it on a piece of paper, and when father reads it, he will feel released in his heart. A seed of suffering has been recognized by someone and there is someone who can understand him. And that person could be his own child—why should our spiritual friend not be our child?

I have organized retreats in Europe and the United States for young children, and when they have practice for seven or five days, they go home and make peace with their father and mother, and they bring their father and mother to the practice center. Even a child of twelve or thirteen years can play the role of kalyanamitra for their father and mother, and many children have been successful. This gives me much faith and happiness. If my child is going on the dark path, a dangerous path, and I am father or mother and I am worried about my child, and I cannot communicate with that child, the method is still the method of deep listening, speaking lovingly, and keeping the Mindfulness Trainings. We can practice, we can talk with all our love, and we can say, "My dear child, I know you have difficulties, I know you suffer and you have not been able to talk about it. Before I did not have the capacity to listen to you, but now I have begun a practice and I can listen to you. So please tell me, have I made some mistakes which have made you suffer?" If the child can say what it is, the child will suffer much less. And if you feel shy, if you cannot yet say this to your child, you can write a letter to them.

We have lost our children. We cannot communicate with them anymore; we cannot share with them the beautiful and the good things. That is a great failure. We have received so many precious jewels from the culture and from the teachings of the Buddha, but because of our difficulties in communication with our children, we have not been able to hand on to them the precious and valuable things of our culture. So if we want to hand on these precious things, we need to have communication. There is only one way to re-establish communication, and that is by listening deeply and speaking lovingly. We have a pen, we have a piece of paper, so why do we not write a letter to be able to open the door of communication which for so long has been tightly closed. Our child is going on this dangerous and dark path. We have to become the kalyanamitra for our child. Why not? We are the father, we are the mother. We have to help our child. We have to be the kalyanamitra of our child. We have to practice loving speech and deep listening in order to open the door of communication again.

When we have been able to persuade our child, then there is a future. Because what is our future if it is not our child? If we lose our child, we do not have a future. Our child will continue us in the future, and will take us into the future. If we lose our child, how can we have that continuation, how can we continue in the future? Therefore, we have to practice in order to be able re-establish the communication, so that we can hand on the culture of our ancestors to our children. If all the children are cut off from their parents because of anger, then the whole cultural tradition will be cut, and all the valuable things which our ancestors left to us will not be handed on. If we can hand on these things, that is a wonderful gift for our society. In our society there are so many hungry ghosts, so many young people wandering around hungry, without any faith in their culture, in their family, in their parents, no faith in the school or university, no faith in the values that we accept. They have no place of refuge, they are like hungry ghosts, without love, without understanding. In our daily life we have thought about so many hungry ghosts, young people today. Among the youth of today, there are so many wandering spirits, who have no faith in anything in their culture. Therefore the duty of parents and grandparents is to

become the kalyanamitra of their children and grandchildren. That is the greatest gift of love that we can give to our children. That is the way we can be bodhisattvas: we are our children's fathers, but we are also our children's friends. We want to be able to revive the communication between father and child. If we can do that, we are disciples of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

(Bell)

(End of talk)